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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 YEREVAN 001000

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [AM](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: EUR DAS BRYZA'S VISIT YIELDS UPDATES ON NK,
TURKEY, IRAN, RFE/RL, GEORGIA, ENERGY, AND DEMOCRATIC
DEVELOPMENT

REF: YEREVAN 935

YEREVAN 00001000 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: CDA R.V. Perina, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: DAS Bryza's intense day of meetings in Yerevan July 30 touched important bases with top GOAM and opposition leaders. The visit was aimed at bilateral business, but Nagorno-Karabakh deliberations nonetheless dominated meetings with the President and Foreign Minister. On Turkey, Bryza learned that Armenia would intercede in Washington to slow a Congressional Armenian "Genocide" Resolution (AGR) only if the Turkish side opens the border, or at least allows the reopening of the cross-border railroad. Key leaders affirmed the goal of rapprochement with Turkey as central to Armenia's future. The President and PM resisted Bryza's pleas to allow Radio Liberty transmissions to continue on public radio, but offered personal assurances the broadcasts would face no obstacles on a private sector radio channel, which would provide RL robust coverage. Bryza delivered messages about the need for Armenian restraint in its relationship with Iran, while interlocutors reiterated Armenia's vital need to maintain a productive economic relationship with Iran as a way to mitigate its geographical isolation. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) CULTIVATING THE RELATIONSHIP: EUR DAS and Nagorno Karabakh special negotiator Matthew Bryza visited Yerevan July 30 to address bilateral concerns, though N-K issues dominated discussions with senior GOAM officials. Bryza met the president, prime minister, foreign minister, parliament speaker, and key opposition party leaders, while also making time for a roundtable discussion of energy security and a press conference. The visit was a valuable signal of United States' concern for the broader relationship with Armenia beyond the N-K conflict.

NAGORNO KARABAKH

13. (C) Bryza's meetings with the president and FM Oskanian focused heavily on the state of play of Minsk Group Nagorno Karabakh talks. While Kocharian's manner was friendly and expansive, he was not disposed to give much ground on the substantive issues that still divide the two sides.FM Oskanian showed more flexibility, and outlined a possible way forward (details in a separate channel). PM Sargsian, who has not been directly involved in the Minsk Group negotiations,

seemed well-briefed on the status of negotiations, and suggested a willingness to reach a compromise, but noted his need to confer with FM Oskanian.

TURKEY: DESIRE FOR CHANGE, ABIDING MISTRUST

14. (C) WHAT ARMENIA NEEDS: FM Oskanian offered the most concrete articulation to date about what Armenia would consider a significant enough gesture of Turkish good faith for Armenia to make a serious effort to soften momentum toward an AGR. Oskanian reiterated Armenia's continued skepticism about Turkey's motives, and concern that overtures to Armenia are aimed only at diverting European pressure and derailing a possible AGR. Oskanian said, however, that if Turkey were to open its border and normalize relations with Armenia, he would be "on a plane the next day" to Washington to confer with Armenia's friends on Capitol Hill and pro-Armenian lobby groups to hold off passage of an AGR. In a new twist, Oskanian said that if Turkey were willing just to restore railroad traffic on the existing Kars-Gyumri rail line, that might be enough for the GOAM to engage the Armenian-American community on AGR. He could not, of course, guarantee an outcome, but vowed to make a good faith, high-level effort to persuade Washington interlocutors that an AGR would be counter to Armenia's national interests if the Turks offered real movement on the border issue.

15. (C) TALK, TALK, TALK: An offer to convene commissions to discuss history and normalizing diplomatic relations would be welcome but insufficient to persuade Armenia to soften its support for AGR, Oskanian said. Armenia has long-since lost

YEREVAN 00001000 002.2 OF 004

patience with repeated Turkish tactics to stall genuine progress by proposing various fora for bilateral talks that lead nowhere. Oskanian was uninterested in reviving the idea of a joint historical commission with Turkey to examine the events of 1915, but was willing to consider the possibility of a broader commission to explore a full range of bilateral issues. Oskanian remarked that "the Turks are interested in process, and we are not. The process is only of interest to us if it would lead to a rapid result." PM Sargsian made similar points later, during his private dinner with Bryza and CDA, commenting that a bilateral commission projects the illusion of progress without any tangible result for Armenia.

16. (C) IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE: Notwithstanding the deep-seated skepticism, Armenian leaders were united in affirming the great importance of the Turkish-Armenian relationship for Armenia's future peaceful development and prosperity. Prime Minister Sargsian described the normalization of relations with Turkey as the key to Armenia's future development. Armenia's up and coming opposition leader, Heritage Party chief Raffi Hovhanissian, spoke of Turkey as the "mother relationship" for Armenia and its prospects. He considered all other regional/geopolitical issues, including NK, subordinate to that one, and noted that "we would have an entirely different region" if Armenia could normalize its relations with Turkey. Rapprochement with Turkey is also the key, in Russophobe Hovhanissian's view, to breaking Armenia's unhealthy dependency on Russia.

IRAN: SOUTHERN LIFELINE, NETTLESOME NEIGHBOR

17. (C) DAS Bryza encouraged President Kocharian to avoid a visit to Yerevan by Iranian President Ahmadinejad, emphasizing the need for Armenia and all other countries to reinforce the international community's position as outlined in UNSCRs 1737 and 1747 that Iran must cease its nuclear enrichment program, and that Tehran's failure to comply will only lead to further isolation. CDA added that the Iranians are trying to use their relationship with Armenia to give the impression the GOAM supports the Iranian position. This tactic was unfortunately successful during Iranian FM Motaki's recent visit to Yerevan. Kocharian noted that certain quotes attributed to senior GOAM officials during the Motaki visit -- notably PM Sargsian's reported comment about Iran's "inalienable right" to a nuclear program -- were media distortions. However, Kocharian defended Armenia's overall policy stance vis-a-vis Iran. He commented that Armenia had kept President Ahmadinejad's border visit to inaugurate the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline low-key, and had already twice found pretexts to postpone Ahmadinejad's visit to Yerevan. Kocharian said Armenia observes all its international obligations on Iran. Armenia must maintain its "practical, economic relations" with Iran, including Armenia's newly-negotiated access to Iran's Caspian Sea port. To do otherwise would be to punish Armenia with further economic isolation as much as Iran. These measures should not be seen as Armenian political support for the Iranian regime. Kocharian relayed Motaki's insistence that Iran's nuclear program was purely peaceful, and not in violation of international agreements. Bryza emphasized that the US is well aware of what Iran is actually doing notwithstanding Motaki's benign claims, and urged Kocharian to be wary of Iranian intentions. He reiterated U.S. concerns on Iran to Deputy Energy Minister Areg Galstyan during a subsequent energy discussion.

RADIO LIBERTY

18. (C) DAS Bryza raised U.S. concerns about the future of Radio Liberty (RL) broadcasts in Armenia, pressing for RL to be

YEREVAN 00001000 003.2 OF 004

able to continue broadcasts on public radio. Kocharian repeated his "personal guarantee" made to CDA July 20 (reftel) that RL would not be taken off the air when it shifted to a private channel. He then elaborated a number of reasons why he "doesn't like" RFE/RL. He claimed RL mocked Armenia and Armenian values in a way that is "unacceptable in such a young country," focusing particular scorn on the RFE/RL youth program "MaxLiberty." Kocharian criticized RFE/RL news broadcasts not for criticizing him and his government, but for calling into question the very integrity of Armenia's nascent democratic system. When DAS Bryza pointed out that RFE/RL would have problems making its back payments to Armenian public radio without a signed contract, Kocharian claimed that RFE/RL had been broadcasting for years without a contract but had made payments in the past. He added that, technically, Armenian law required formal approval by the

public
broadcasting board for RFE/RL to broadcast on public radio,
but that
Armenian authorities had looked the other way and never
compelled
RFE/RL to seek such approval. Kocharian then reiterated that
RFE/RL
broadcasts should continue in Armenia, but on a private
network rather
than the public airwaves.

¶9. (C) PM Sargsian aligned himself with the president's
line on RFE/RL. He said he did not understand why RFE/RL
insisted
on being transmitted over public radio instead of a private
radio
network, and dismissed concerns that the private network
might not
have the same audience reach as public radio. He echoed on
his own
behalf the president's vow that RL would be allowed to
broadcast
undisturbed on the private channel.

DRAWING ARMENIA AND GEORGIA CLOSER

¶10. (C) FM Oskanian said he had become convinced during his
recent trip through Georgia that "Armenia and Georgia need
to do more together." While the FM was not specific, he
said Armenia and Georgia should work to "take down fences"
and "build a common space." Oskanian was thrilled that
Armenia
and Georgia had finally demarcated their border along
Georgia's
Samtskhe-Javakheti region. As a key next step, Oskanian
urged that Georgia, Armenia, and the U.S. work together to
rebuild the 24 kilometers of road from Armenia to the
Georgian transportation hub of Akhalkalaki, which would then
tie
Armenia into the road being built between Akhalkalaki and
Tbilisi
under Georgia's Millennium Challenge program. Bryza recalled
that he had been working in past years with the
Armenian-American
community to develop such a road project with Diaspora
support.
Oskanian agreed to pursue this option.

ELECTIONS

¶11. (C) In each of his meetings and during his press
conference, DAS Bryza congratulated Armenian officials on
having conducted the best elections to date on Armenian
territory, while noting that there is still important work to
be done to make the presidential elections better still.

COMMENT

YEREVAN 00001000 004.2 OF 004

¶12. (C) The chief value of this visit was in reaffirming to
the Armenian government and public that United States
concerns about Armenia reach more broadly than the
oft-reported Minsk Group negotiations on NK. Further, in a
culture that places a high premium on personal
relationships, this visit -- and especially the long,
private dinner with PM and presidential heir presumptive
Serzh Sargsian -- was a valuable opportunity to build
political capital, as well as to deliver some key messages
on Iran, Turkey, and Radio Liberty. The outcome was not

dramatic on any of these fronts, but nonetheless very useful in making our critical points, listening to Armenian perspectives, and illuminating some ways forward on important concerns.

¶13. (U) EUR DAS Bryza has cleared on this cable
PERINA